

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the Legislative Session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.



Sergeant Charles Floyd was the quartermaster with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. A native of Kentucky, he may have been distantly related to William Clark, one of the expedition's leaders. He died on August 20, 1804, in what would become part of northwest Iowa. His remains were subsequently unearthed and moved a short distance to where the Sergeant Floyd Monument stands today. The Sergeant Floyd Monument was the first designated National Historic Landmark in the United States.



**This excerpt from the Lewis and Clark map of 1814 depicts the rivers of the western part of the Iowa Territory. Sergeant Floyd's grave is noted on the map. Source: Wikipedia**

## Sergeant Floyd Monument



**Top:** Scaffolding surrounds the monument during construction.

**Left:** Finishing touches are added to the top of the monument.

**Photos:** *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*

References:

[Sergeant Floyd Monument](#)

[Sioux City Museum](#)

[U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#)



**The Sergeant Floyd Monument was dedicated on May 30, 1901.**

On the east and west faces of the monument, just above the base, are two very artistic bronze tablets, each 4 by 6 feet in size, containing the following inscriptions respectively:

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE,  
MADE DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THOMAS JEFFERSON,  
THIRD PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,  
APRIL 30, 1803;  
OF ITS SUCCESSFUL EXPLORATION BY THE HEROIC MEMBERS OF THE  
LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION;  
OF THE VALOR OF THE AMERICAN SOLDIER, AND FORTITUDE OF THE  
AMERICAN PIONEERS  
TO WHOM THESE GREAT STATES WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI  
OWE THEIR SECURE FOUNDATION.

**FLOYD.**

THIS SHAFT MARKS THE BURIAL PLACE OF SERGEANT CHARLES FLOYD,  
A MEMBER OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION.  
HE DIED IN HIS COUNTRY'S SERVICE,  
AND WAS BURIED NEAR THIS SPOT  
AUGUST 20, 1804.

"GRAVES OF SUCH MEN ARE PILGRIM SHRINES,  
SHRINES TO NO CLASS OR CREED CONFINED."

ERECTED A. D. 1900  
BY THE FLOYD MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION,  
AIDED BY THE UNITED STATES AND THE STATE OF IOWA.

References:

[\*Iowa Historical Record\*](#)

[Lewis and Clark Journals on the day of Floyd's death](#)

Sergeant Floyd's Reburial

# IOWA HISTORICAL RECORD.

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Entered at the Post Office, at Iowa City, Iowa, as second class matter.

## A LETTER RELATIVE TO THE DISINTERMENT OF THE REMAINS OF SERGEANT FLOYD.

BY N. LEVERING.

SHERMAN, CAL., May 1, 1901.

*Editor of Iowa Historical Record:*



ENCLOSED find statement relative to the disinterment of Sergeant Floyd, etc. There have been many errors published relative to the matter, which I wish to correct as far as I am able. I presume that this cannot be published before the dedication which I am informed will take place the 30th of this month or the 25th of June, next. I, perhaps, had more to do with the disinterment and reburial of Sergeant Floyd's remains than any man now living. My object is to see the facts connected with it published. I hope to be at the dedication of the monument.

Truly yours,

N. LEVERING.

### DISINTERMENT OF THE REMAINS OF SERGEANT CHARLES FLOYD.

My attention has recently been called to statements published by the late Prof. Elliott Coues for the benefit of the Floyd Monument Association. It must be expected that after the lapse of many years errors, like tares among wheat, will make their appearance. As far as practicable they should be weeded out. The dates that I have at hand, with those that

cluster in my memory-box, warrant me in speaking advisedly of much that I shall say relative to the disinterment of Sergeant Floyd's remains, which occurred in the latter part of March, 1857, (the day not now remembered) and not in April or May as has been stated, and which I know to be incorrect. As to who first discovered the imminent danger to which the grave was in, I only know that Dr. Sloan, who on his way from Sergeant's Bluff to Sioux City, noticed its condition on Saturday afternoon, and reported the matter to me. I at once called on Dr. S. P. Yeomans, Register of the United States Land Office, Gen. Andrew Leach, Receiver, and others. After a hasty consultation as to the facts related by Dr. Sloan, it was thought best to call a meeting of the citizens that evening at the United States Land Office to take some action to save if possible all that remained earthly of the heroic Floyd. I at once set out to notify all I met with of the meeting, with the result of a spontaneous patriotic outburst of enthusiasm and a house well filled. A committee was appointed to repair to the grave at an early hour next morning, (as has been stated in a former account.) When the committee arrived there the wind was blowing a terrific gale, so much so that one's pedestrian organs were hardly sufficient to preserve an equilibrium with the more elevated portion of the physical frame. I laid down and crawled up to the brink of the precipice where I could look over. I discovered that a portion of the grave had slid down the bank, with the cedar post that had marked it, and that a leg bone was protruding from the bank, and not the end of the coffin as has been stated by some. A young man (not Dr. Sloan) whose name I do not now remember, but who told me he was a native of Indiana, requested the committee to allow him to open the grave. His request was granted. A long rope was tied around his waist when, with a spade, he went to work, while the committee and others who held on to the rope lay down upon the ground in order to prevent the young man from going over the precipice. He was not let down to fasten

the rope around the end of the coffin, as has been stated. When the bones were uncovered it was found that Floyd had been buried with his feet to the river, and that the cedar post that had slid into the river had stood at the foot of the grave. The skull and lower jaw with some smaller bones were at the other end of the grave. I stood there and received them and passed them to others that stood near me.

Now taking the history that Prof. Coues gives, we can readily see how these errors, with others, may have occurred. When Lewis and Clark on their return homeward visited the grave, they found that it had been disturbed by wild men or animals, evidently having been opened, as they say they filled it up, and state that they carved upon the cedar post, Sergeant C. Floyd, with the date of death.

Catlin, who visited the grave some years later, says that the cedar post only bore the initials of his name. In 1839 Jean N. Niccollet, a noted traveler, visited Floyd's grave and says "his men replaced the signal that was blown down that marked the grave." Now taking these scraps of history as quoted by Prof. Coues, with a liberal and reasonable construction, we note that the grave had been disturbed, that the post, or whatever designated the grave, had been blown down or otherwise removed, and when replaced perhaps by a new one, (as no inscription was upon the one last there in 1857) those replacing it not knowing which was the head or foot of the grave would be as likely to place it at the foot as at the head. The grave having been opened, it is reasonable to suppose that if done by wild animals they would naturally come in contact with his hands folded across his breast first, and would wrench his arms off and carry them away, which would account for no arm and perhaps other smaller bones not being found. In former sketches that I have written relative to the cedar post standing at the head of the grave, I should have said at the foot, as I now speak advisedly upon that point. This will make matters more clear as to the expression "sliding into the river." After gathering up all bones, with

some pieces of the coffin, I wrapped them up in a blanket and carried them to my home. My wife not being as favorably impressed with their ghastly appearance, nor their rattle, as she would have been with a church organ, I removed them to the law office of M. F. Moore, where they remained until they were reburied on the 28th of May, following. In handling the skull a back tooth dropped out, which I picked up and placed in my pocket, where I carried it for some months, when I sent it to the State Historical Society, where it now is.

A few days prior to the reinterment of Floyd's bones, I raised by contribution among the liberal citizens of Sioux City funds sufficient to defray expenses of coffin, digging grave, and other necessary expenses. I placed the bones in the coffin, and from the opening of the grave in the latter part of March, 1857, to the closing of the grave on May 28, following, I had more to do with the matter than any other man now living. Many of the facts here stated are fully corroborated by my wife, who is yet living. As to names I may not have been as specific as I should have been. Capt. J. B. S. Todd, (cousin of Mrs. Abraham Lincoln) was an intimate friend through whom I became acquainted with D. W. Scott, as an old army officer. Whether he was then in the service or not I do not now remember. He spoke to me of his having at one time resided in the State of Indiana. I presume that he is the same man referred to by Prof. Coues. As to a portion of the cedar post now being in possession of Mr. Holman, this must be an error. His article must be a relic of the coffin, which evidently consisted of short oak puncheon or oak slabs, set on end around the corpse and covered with the same material, a portion of which, doubtless, is in the rooms of the State Historical Society at this time. The grave and texture of the wood is evidently that of oak.

I have particularized the statement in order that clouds of doubt will not obscure the facts and leave the mind to wander in doubt and uncertainty. Time in its flight with the aid of

lively imagination leads to much perversion and subversion of facts. Truth like fruit should be harvested at maturity before retrogression becomes the spoiler, and thus preserve its crown of glory.

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